

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Commodity Credit Corporation
Natural Resources Conservation Service

**Contribution Agreements Fiscal Year 2006 Announcement of Program
Funding for New Jersey**

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.914

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NRCS requests applications for Contribution Agreements (CA) under the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) in New Jersey to stimulate cooperative partnerships that create or enhance habitat for target species and habitat types. Contribution Agreements provide up to 50% of the eligible and reasonable costs of a qualified project on non-federal lands. Applications are accepted for projects located in New Jersey only. For FY 2006, up to \$750,000 is available for the NJ-WHIP-CA competition. Funds will be awarded through a statewide competitive process. There are six CA components available in FY 2006: Bog turtle, American woodcock, Bobwhite quail, Grassland birds, Wetland function and health, and School site habitat development. Applications are requested from eligible government or non-government organizations or individuals for competitive consideration of awards for projects between one and three years in duration. This notice identifies the objectives for CA projects, the eligibility criteria for projects and associated instructions needed to apply for a CA.

PROPOSAL DUE DATE AND ADDRESSES: Proposals must be received in the NRCS NJ state office by 3 p.m., Eastern Standard Time (EST) on March 3, 2006. The address for hand-delivered applications or applications submitted using regular mail, express mail or overnight courier service is: WHIP Contribution Agreements; c/o Janice Reid, ASTC-P; Natural Resources Conservation Service; 220 Davidson Avenue 4th Floor; Somerset, NJ 08873.

Applications may not be submitted electronically.

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I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

Contribution Agreements were established as part of the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) [7 U.S.C. 6962a, 16 U.S.C. 383a, 7CFR Part 636 (CFDA 10.914)] under Section 1240N of the Food Security Act of 1985, as added by section 2502 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-171). Through Contribution Agreements, the Secretary of Agriculture may share in the cost of projects that serve a mutual interest of the parties in carrying out NRCS programs, with both parties contributing resources to carry out the program activity. The Secretary of Agriculture delegated the authority for the administration of WHIP to the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), who is vice president of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). The Chief in turn delegated authority for each state to the State Conservationist for the administration of individual contracts and agreements.

B. Overview

Under the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), NRCS provides technical and financial assistance for creating, enhancing and maintaining wildlife habitat on non-federal lands. The State WHIP plan identifies priority wildlife habitat categories. In addition, the State Technical Committee recommends other declining or at-risk species for consideration. The purpose of NJ's WHIP Contribution Agreements is to stimulate interest and focus projects on wildlife categories selected each year from these recommendations, leverage Federal investment in wildlife habitat enhancement and protection, and build cooperative partnerships to further conservation goals.

NJ-NRCS will accept applications for single- or multi-year projects, not to exceed three years, submitted to NJ-NRCS from eligible entities, including Federally-recognized Indian Tribes, State and local governments, and non-governmental organizations and individuals, for projects benefiting or located on lands in New Jersey. Successful applicants will receive up to 50% of the eligible and reasonable costs of a qualified project through the Contribution Agreement.

New Jersey WHIP Contribution Agreement projects are expected to provide increased public awareness and concern for threatened, endangered and at-risk species, while helping to increase the populations of these species. Applications are solicited for the full range of wildlife concerns detailed in this notice.

Funds will be awarded through a statewide competitive process. Proposals will be evaluated by a technical review panel and scored based on the Criteria for Proposal Evaluation identified in this notice. Scored applications will be forwarded to the State Conservationist for final award selections. Individual awards that exceed \$150,000 must also be approved by the NRCS Regional Assistant Chief.

C. Funding Priorities

NJ selected six wildlife concerns for potential funding through WHIP Contribution Agreements for fiscal year 2006:

(1) Bog Turtle

The objective of this wildlife concern is to increase habitat for the bog turtle, which is protected in the state by its endangered status. Sphagnum bogs, swamps, and marshy meadows having clear, slow moving streams with soft muddy bottoms serve as optimal habitat. Bog turtles

disappear when the muddy substrate and associated flora are replaced by hardwood trees such as red maples. Management for bog turtle usually involves removing and delaying the return of trees to grassy meadows through mechanical or biological means.

(2) American Woodcock

The objective of this wildlife concern is to increase habitat for the American woodcock, a declining species over most of its range. The species relies on old fields and woody, early successional habitat or young forest. Management for woodcock usually involves improved management of farm fields, pastures, and old fields, and increased forest management where ecologically appropriate. Species such as ruffed grouse, yellow breasted chat, golden winged warbler and others would also benefit from this management.

(3) Bobwhite Quail

The objective of this wildlife concern is to increase habitat for the Bobwhite quail, a declining species over most of its range. Nesting and feeding habitats include a diverse array of grasses, forbs, and shrubs in upland areas in southern New Jersey. Quail do not inhabit areas of thick or dense vegetation or mature woodlands. Including grassy field borders, fallow areas and set aside land is usually the accepted practice to increase quail populations.

(4) Grassland Birds

The objective of this wildlife concern is to increase habitat for a variety of ground nesting birds that are declining in population due to habitat loss. These species prefer large open fields predominated by native warm season grasses. Establishment of native grasses often takes 2-3 years; however once established, the native grasses need fewer inputs (such as lime and fertilizer) than traditional grass plantings. Maintenance includes mowing or burning every other year to keep woody vegetation out and maintain the grassland ecosystem.

(5) Wetland function and health

The objective of this wildlife concern is to implement projects that restore or enhance wetland wildlife areas, including coastal marshes, vernal pools and saturated meadows. Coastal marshes in New Jersey are an important resource for millions of migratory and resident birds; many coastal march areas have been degraded by the impacts of urbanization. Restoration can include removal of invasive species and the establishment of native species. Existing saturated and previously drained meadows can be manipulated to provide depressions required by obligate vernal pool species for various parts of their life cycle. Projects under this category can also include enhancement of adjacent early successional or riparian habitats that increase the overall project potential for success.

(6) School Site Habitat Development

The objective of this wildlife concern is to implement new areas of habitat suitable for school grounds that are:

1. Approved by the school and/or district governing body,
2. Maintained year-round by school staff and/or volunteers,
3. Valuable additions to the surrounding habitat, and
4. Connected to or benefiting an at-risk species.

D. Program Authorization

Section 1240N of the Food Security Act of 1985, as added by section 2502 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-171) established Contribution Agreements as part of the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) [7 U.S.C. 6962a, 16 U.S.C. 383a, 7CFR Part 636 (CFDA 10.914)]. Through Contribution Agreements, the Secretary of Agriculture may share in the cost of projects that serve a mutual interest of the parties in carrying out NRCS programs; with both parties contributing resources to carry out the program activity. WHIP is administered by NRCS under the authorities of the CCC.

II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Fund Availability

The CCC, through the NRCS WHIP program, will provide up to \$750,000 for WHIP Contribution Agreements for fiscal year 2006 in New Jersey. The CCC expects to fund up to 20 proposals under this RFP, with a minimum award of \$5000.

B. Project Timing

Agreements are anticipated to be obligated by and work may commence on June 1, 2006. Projects should be completed by May 31, 2009, with final payment requests submitted by September 1, 2009.

III. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Organization or Individual Eligibility

A WHIP Contribution Agreement applicant must be a Federally-recognized Indian Tribe, State or local unit of government, non-governmental organization, or individual. The applicant will be responsible for providing the technical assistance required to successfully implement and complete the project. The applicant must provide a minimum of 50 percent of the total project cost in non-federal funding.

B. Project Eligibility

To be eligible, projects must involve land suitable for the habitat or species identified in the project description, be located in New Jersey, and be operated by WHIP eligible entities.

IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. How to Obtain Application Materials

All forms and materials needed to complete an application are posted on the following website: http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip/whip_rfp.html. Alternately, a request for this information can be made to the NJ-NRCS State Office at 220 Davidson Avenue, Somerset NJ 08873, (732) 537-6040 or by email to janice.reid@nj.usda.gov.

B. Proposal Content and Format

Applications must contain the information set forth below in order to receive consideration for an award. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NRCS or others as to the relative merits of the project described in the application. Applications must be submitted in the

following format:

Applications are to be typewritten on 8½” x 11” white paper, double spaced, and on one side only. The text of the proposal must be typewritten in a font no smaller than 11-point, with one-inch margins.

Proposals must include all required forms and narrative sections described below; incomplete applications will not be considered. Information not requested will be discarded. If submitting proposals for more than one project, submit a separate, complete application package for each project.

1. Cover Sheet: Applications must use Standard Form 424 (SF-424) as the cover sheet for each project proposal. Note that in Section 15 of the SF-424, the funding amounts listed must reflect the amounts requested and contributed for the entire duration of the project.

2. Project Abstract: Each proposal must contain a summary of not more than two pages that provides the following:

- a. Project title;
- b. Project duration (beginning and ending dates);
- c. Name, address, telephone, e-mail, and other contact information for the project director;
- d. Names and affiliations of project partners;
- e. Project objectives and wildlife concern(s) to be addressed;
- f. Summary of the work to be performed;
- g. Total project cost; and,
- h. Total Federal funds requested.

3. Project Description: Each project must be completely and accurately described in no more than 6 typewritten, double-spaced pages, which must include the following:

- a. Project background: Describe current habitat situation on the lands proposed for funding;
- b. Project objectives: Be specific, using qualitative and quantitative measures, if possible, to describe the project’s purpose and goals;
- c. Project methods: Describe clearly the methodology of the project and the tools or processes that will be used to implement the project;
- d. Location and size of project or project area: Describe the location(s) of the project and the relative size and scope (e.g., acres, types, etc.) of the project area. Maps, if provided, can be in addition to the five (5) page project description;
- e. Project action plan and timeline: Provide a table listing project actions, timeframes, and associated milestones through project completion.
- f. Project management: Provide information on how the project will be organized and managed. Include a brief list of key project personnel and their anticipated contributions to the project. Identify who will participate in monitoring and evaluating the project;
- g. Benefits or results expected: Identify the results and benefits to be derived from the proposed project activities. If applicable, describe how results will be communicated to others via outreach activities; and,
- h. Project evaluation: Describe how the project will be evaluated to quantify the results for the final report.

4. Budget Information: Use Standard Form 424A (SF-424A) to summarize and document budget needs. Indicate the total amount (both cash and in-kind) of non-Federal matching support that will be provided to the proposed project. In addition, provide a detailed one-page narrative

in support of the budget for the project. Itemize the costs necessary for successful completion of the proposed project that are shown on the SF-424A. Identify the source, the amount, and the nature (cash or in-kind) of any matching funds listed on the SF-424A.

5. Certifications: All applications must include a signed Standard Form 424B - Assurances, Non-construction Programs. Applicants, by signing and submitting an application, assure and certify that they are in compliance with the following from 7 Code of Federal Register:

- a. Part 3017, Government-wide Debarment and Suspension (Nonprocurement) (http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_04/7cfr3017_04.html);
- b. Part 3018, New Restrictions on Lobbying (http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_04/7cfr3018_04.html); and,
- c. Part 3021, Government-wide Requirements for Drug-Free Workplace (Financial Assistance) (http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_04/7cfr3021_04.html).

C. Proposal Submission

Applicants must submit one signed original and four (4) complete copies of each project application, accompanied by an electronic copy on a 3½-inch diskette or compact disc (CD). Electronic files must be Microsoft Word (doc), Microsoft Excel (xls), or Acrobat (pdf) files. Applications submitted via facsimile or e-mail will not be accepted.

Submit written proposals to:

NJ-WHIP Contributions Agreements
Assistant State Conservationist for Programs
Natural Resources Conservation Service
220 Davidson Avenue 4th Floor
Somerset NJ 08873

D. Proposal Due Date

Proposals must be received in the NJ-NRCS State Office by 3 p.m., Eastern Standard Time (EST) on March 3, 2006. A proposal's postmark date is not a factor in whether an application is received on time. The applicant assumes the risk of any delays in proposal delivery. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit completed applications via overnight mail or delivery service to ensure timely receipt by NRCS.

E. Acknowledgement of Submission

Receipt of all applications will be acknowledged by e-mail. Therefore, applicants are strongly encouraged to provide accurate and legible e-mail addresses. If the applicant does not receive an acknowledgment within 60 days of the submission deadline, please contact the program manager.

F. Funding Restrictions

The indirect costs (F&A) for CA awards may not exceed 15 percent of the total Federal funds provided under each award. Awardees may not use unrecovered indirect costs as part of their matching funds.

WHIP-CA funds may not be used to pay any of the following costs unless otherwise permitted by law, or approved in writing by the Authorized Departmental Officer in advance of incurring such costs:

- a. Costs above the amount of funds authorized for the project;
- b. Costs incurred prior to the effective date of the award;
- c. Costs incurred after the expiration date of the agreement (including any approved no-cost extensions of time). Funds may be expended after the expiration date to liquidate legitimate obligations incurred by the award recipient on or before the expiration date;
- d. Costs which lie outside the scope of the approved project and any amendments thereto;
- e. Entertainment costs, regardless of their apparent relationship to project objectives;
- f. Compensation for injuries to persons, or damage to property arising out of project activities;
- g. Consulting services performed by a Federal employee during official duty hours when such consulting services result in the payment of additional compensation to the employee; and,
- h. Renovation or refurbishment of research or related spaces; the purchase or installation of fixed equipment in such spaces; and the planning, repair, rehabilitation, acquisition, or construction of buildings or facilities.

This list is not exhaustive. Questions regarding the allowances of particular items of cost should be directed to the contact person above.

V. APPLICATION REVIEW

A. Proposal Review and Selection Process

Prior to technical review, each application will be screened for completeness and compliance with the provisions of this notice. Incomplete applications and those that do not meet the provisions of this notice will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be e-mailed to the applicant.

Applications meeting the provisions of this notice will be scored by a Review Panel against the Criteria for Proposal Evaluation listed below. Scored applications will be forwarded to the Program Manager, who will certify the rankings from the review panel, and ensure that the proposal evaluations are consistent with program objectives. The Program Manager will make recommendations to the State Conservationist for final selection and funding decisions.

B. Criteria for Proposal Evaluation

Review panels will use the following criteria to evaluate project proposals. The weight of each criterion in the evaluation is listed in parentheses.

1. For wildlife categories listed in section I.C. (1) through I.C. (5):
 - a. Number of sites and/or acres of habitat developed (10%);
 - b. Number of partners contributing financial support (10%);
 - c. Applicant contribution to the total cost (20%);
 - d. Project location on public, private, or private preserved land (10%);
 - e. Likelihood of project success (10%);
 - f. Public access (10%); and
 - g. Importance of habitat development proposal to existing at-risk species populations (30%).
2. For wildlife habitat development projects as per section I.C. (6):
 - a. Number of sites proposed (10%);
 - b. Number of partners contributing financial support (10%);

- c. Applicant contribution to the total cost (20%);
- d. Extent of school community involvement (30%);
- e. Likelihood of project success (10%); and
- f. Use of native species and connectivity to an at-risk species (20%).

C. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

NJ-WHIP-CA awards are anticipated to be announced on April 1, 2006.

VI. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Award Notification

Applicants who have been selected will be notified by the State Conservationist by mail within 15 business days of the final selection. Selected applicants will not have the authority to begin project work until the Contribution Agreement is signed by a NRCS authorizing official. All projects will be authorized by June 1, 2006.

NRCS will designate a Technical Representative to provide technical oversight for each project receiving an award. The Technical Representative will work with the successful applicant to finalize a Plan of Work based on the submitted goals and objectives. The Plan of Work will be finalized within 30 days of award notification.

NRCS will designate an Administrative Representative to provide contract oversight. The Administrative Representative will prepare a draft Contribution Agreement based on the Plan of Work and Budget information submitted. The Contribution Agreement will require agreement by applicant signature within 60 days of award notification.

Applicants whose proposals have not been selected will be notified by official letter within 15 business days of the final selection.

B. Contribution Agreement

The CCC, through NRCS, will use a Contribution Agreement to document participation in the WHIP program. Under a Contribution Agreement, selected applicants may receive grants of up to 50 percent of the total project cost. Applicants must provide non-Federal funding for at least 50 percent of the project cost.

The Contribution Agreement will include:

- project objectives and deliverables;
- project progress and budget reporting requirements;
- award amount and budget information;
- information regarding requests for advance of funds or reimbursement;
- other requirements and terms deemed necessary by the CCC to protect the interests of the United States.

Neither the approval of any application nor the award of any grant agreement commits or obligates the United States to provide further support of a project or any portion thereof or implies any endorsement.

C. Reporting Requirements

Award recipients are required to submit quarterly financial status report (SF 269) no later than 30 days after the end of each quarter and 90 days after project completion.

In addition, every six months award recipients must submit a written report of progress (due January 15 and July 15 of each year). This report is distinct from the quarterly financial report described above. Each progress report shall cover work performed during the previous 6-month period, including any funded or unfunded time extensions, a comparison of actual accomplishments to project goals, and a statement of work projected to be completed in the next 6-month period. A progress report template will be provided to grantees by NRCS.

NRCS recommends that the grantee work closely with the Technical and Administrative Representatives throughout the course of the project. The award recipient must comply with any requests for information from these individuals.

Upon passage of the completion date of the project, a final report must be submitted within 90 days detailing project activities, funding received, funding expended, and results achieved.

VII. NJ-WHIP-CA CONTACTS

For programmatic questions or administrative questions, please contact:

Janice Reid, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs

Natural Resources Conservation Service

220 Davidson Ave, 4th floor, Somerset NJ 08873

Phone: (732) 537-6042

facsimile: (732) 537-6095; Subject: WHIP Contribution Agreements

e-mail: janice.reid@nj.usda.gov; Subject: WHIP Contribution Agreements

Additional information about NJ-WHIP-CA is available on the NJ programs webpage:
www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip

Signed in Somerset, NJ on January 10, 2006.

ANTHONY J. KRAMER

State Conservationist

Natural Resources Conservation Service